



# The Daily Courier

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## Daily water use reaches danger zone

*Prescott has rule banning daytime sprinkler use*

By CINDY BARKS

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PRESCOTT As the first weekend of summer approaches, Prescott officials will be paying particular attention to the levels in city water tanks.

A number of conditions have combined hot, windy weather, fire danger in the extreme zone and water use that has topped 12 million gallons per day to cause City Manager Steve Norwood to issue the warning that has become virtually an annual summer ritual: "It's time to take reasonable conservation measures."

On Tuesday, Prescott's water use reached 12.06 million gallons a level that officials say is "dangerously close" to the daily capacity of 12.9 million gallons.

"The big concerns I have is here we are approaching the weekend, and we have all of these fires burning," Norwood said Thursday morning.

During extreme fire danger, Norwood said the city strives to keep sufficient levels in its storage tanks. With water use in the 12-million-gallon range, he said, "water is going out (of the tanks) as fast as we can pump it."

City officials are asking local residents to take the edge off water use by using smart irrigation practices. Already, a city ordinance bans daytime sprinkler irrigation. The City Council approved that ordinance earlier this year in an effort to conserve water.

If water use continues to rise, Norwood said he likely would take the next step, which would involve limiting outdoor irrigation to every other day, based upon street numbers.

"This weekend, we'll be keeping a close eye on usage," Norwood said, "to decide if we have to take the next step."

The warnings about water use are nothing new for Prescottians. Each summer, it seems, before monsoon rains take the pressure off the system, the city issues similar warnings.

"It's the same year-in, year-out," Norwood said. While daily water use hovers in the 5-million-gallon range in March, it annually spikes as outdoor irrigation increases in the hot summer weather.

To do its part, the city will begin limiting its own irrigation. "We'll start pulling back on irrigation of parks," Norwood said. "If it gets a little brown, then so be it."

Shaun Rydell, the city's water conservation coordinator, noted that her department has plenty of information available for residents who want to learn about reducing their irrigation water use. She suggested that some residents might be putting more water than necessary on their outdoor landscaping.

Norwood acknowledged that past warnings appear to have educated more local residents about water conservation. Despite the addition of about 1,500 new homes in the past three years, he said, "The peak water demand hasn't changed." Prescott's summer use still peaks at about 12.5 million gallons a day.

By next year, Norwood expects a reduction in water use because of a significant water-rate increase that will go into effect July 1. While he said "People won't feel the impact of that this summer," the higher rates likely will be a deterrent against high water use by next year's summer season.

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